From: Ben Loftis
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/17/02 2:07pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

To whom it may concern: I am submitting this letter in response to your request for ideas about the Microsoft antitrust case. In my opinion, Microsoft is trying to stifle new competition by raising the cost of entry into the operating system market. In addition, they are using their monoply to "lock" consumers into only using Microsoft products. Both of these practices are damaging to consumers. Unfortunately there are already multiple examples of the effectiveness of these practices. BeOS, for example, was a much more sophisticated and reliable product, but it was unable to compete in the desktop OS market because most potential customers were locked into the Windows monoply.The two most offensive practices are proprietary file formats created by the operating system and their unwillingness to allow other operating systems to coincide with Windows on the same machine. By bundling common software packages into Windows (email, word processing, html, media files), and then using proprietary file formats, Microsoft has guaranteed that the majority of users will be dependent on Microsoft products to read and edit their own, personal records! As a user of multiple operating systems, I can personally attest that Microsoft makes it nearly impossible to share basic documents between other operating systems. Because Microsoft invents their own formats instead of using standard formats for these basic file types, they raise the cost of switching to a new operating system so high that most users aren't willing to switch from Windows.The "boot issue" is also important. If an amateur user tries to install Windows in addition to an existing operating system, he will find that Windows has overwritten the Master Boot Record of the boot disk, apparently making the previous operating system, and all it's data, disappear! Although this condition can be reversed, it can be very disconcerting to a casual computer user, and it makes the prosect of installing a new operating system too scary for most people to contemplate. This results in far fewer sales for competing OS developers. I suggest three straighforward solutions to these problems: 1) Require that Microsoft use open-source file formats in any products that are bundled with the operating system, or available as free downloads from Microsoft. (note: this does NOT include Microsoft Office!)2) Require that Microsoft publish the format of all previous documents that were generated by software that was bundled with Windows. 3) Disallow Windows to overwrite the Master Boot Record of a disk unless the operator explicitly agrees to do so. These solutions would not incur undue cost to Microsoft, nor are they technically infeasible. They simply help make sure that future versions of Windows will "play well with others" and not trap consumers into using Microsoft-only products. Thank you, Ben Loftis 301 Honey Ct Nolensville, TN 37135

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